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LIVING IN LOVE AND FAITH UPDATE SPRING 2025



LIVING
IN LOVE
& FAITH



THE CHURCH
OF ENGLAND

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INTRODUCTION: LIVING IN LOVE AND FAITH

How do questions about identity, sexuality, relationships and marriage fit within the bigger picture of the good news of Jesus Christ? What does it mean to live in love and faith together as a Church? Since 2017, the Church of England has been travelling together exploring these questions as part of the so called Living in Love and Faith (LLF) process.

A suite of **LLF resources**, published in 2020, was engaged with by a range of people across the Church of England. As a result of this journey of listening and discerning, engaging with Scripture and the tradition of the Church, the bishops shared their response with General Synod in February 2023.

This response took the LLF journey from listening and discerning to implementing. It included an apology by the House of Bishops for the failure to welcome LGBTQI+ people into the Church, committing itself to address this lack of welcome and inclusion.

Part of this response has been to commend a further suite of resources and prayers called the **Prayers of Love and Faith**. These Prayers are for same-sex couples because no provision was previously made for them through existing public forms of prayer.

Despite big differences over the best approach to take, the Church agrees it wants to better include, support and cherish LGBTQI+ people. We hope to find a way to continue to walk together, respecting our difference and collectively embracing a radical Christian inclusion.

Gracious God,
from love we are made
and to love we shall return.
May our love for one another
kindle flames of joy and hope.
May the light and warmth of your grace
inspire us to follow the Way of Jesus Christ,
and serve you in your Kingdom,
now and for ever. Amen

Source: Prayers of Love and Faith

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TIMELINE TO DATE



2017

Following the **Shared Conversations**, General Synod rejects the House of Bishops' paper on marriage and same sex relations. The Archbishops call for 'Radical New Christian Inclusion'.



2022

Listening to the Whole Church: the Next Steps Group works on gathering feedback from those participating in the LLF Course or engaging with the materials in different ways.

The result is the publication of *Listening with Love and Faith*, accompanied by a theological piece of work, *Friendship and the Body of Christ*.



2024

General Synod asks for further work to be done on the Prayers of Love and Faith and the timetable for consideration of the status of clergy in same-sex civil marriage.



2018

Thematic Working Groups are set up to think about topics of identity, sexuality, relationships and marriage.



2020 – 2021

A suite of Living in Love and Faith **resources** is published, including the LLF Book and Course. The Pastoral Advisory Group of the House of Bishops creates the **Pastoral Principles**.



2023

Responding & implementing : The House of Bishops sets up the LLF Implementation Working Groups. Members are drawn from across the Church of England.

The Prayers of Love and Faith are introduced as a Pastoral Response to be used by and with same-sex couples, recognising all that is good, holy, and faithful in these relationships and asking for God's blessing over their journey of love and faith.

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LIVING IN LOVE AND FAITH – UPDATE SPRING 2025

The Living in Love and Faith process is part of a longer journey of the Church of England to listen, learn and respond to changing views in our society towards identity, sexuality, relationships and marriage. Despite big differences over the best approach to take, the Church agrees it needs to better include and support LGBTQI+ people.

In **July 2024**, General Synod asked the **House of Bishops** to undertake further work on two aspects of the LLF process:

1. The Prayers of Love and Faith, specifically on how to use these in so-called ‘bespoke’ services and what pastoral reassurance might be needed for this.
2. A timetable for consideration of the question on removing restrictions for clergy entering same-sex civil marriages.

The House of Bishops has asked the **Faith and Order Commission** (FAOC), and

the Episcopal Reference Group (the episcopal members of FAOC), together with the LLF team and the LLF Working Groups for advice and to draft proposals. The draft proposals remain flexible, and both consultations and further theological advice will help the House of Bishops refine them, before deciding if and how to take them forward, including bringing them back General Synod to be discussed and voted on.

This leaflet aims to be as clear and concise as possible. However, because of the complexity of the draft proposals, some technical detail is unavoidable.

This leaflet provides an update from the LLF Programme Board on draft proposals that could serve as a possible way forward. Feedback is being sought to help the College and House of Bishops as they consider these suggestions in 2025. This will help refine and develop the final proposals which, if supported by the House of Bishops, will be brought to General Synod in 2026.

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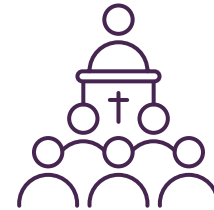
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PRAYERS OF LOVE AND FAITH

The **Prayers of Love and Faith** are a range of liturgical resources that can be used in private prayer and regular church services. They enable couples in committed, faithful same-sex relationships to give thanks to God for their faithfulness and commitment to one another.

The Prayers of Love and Faith are not a form of marriage service. The Church of England teaches that marriage is between one man and one woman. So, while marriage in Church is not open to everyone, these Prayers offer ways for same-sex couples to ask for God's guidance and blessing over their lives in private, at home or within a church.

The Prayers can be used in private by anyone who wishes to. When used in a regular church service such as a Eucharist or Evening Prayer, the Prayers should only be used by licensed ministers. Using the Prayers of Love and Faith is always optional and at the discretion of the minister. A church does not have to take a position on the use of the Prayers of Love and Faith.



Prayers of Love and Faith: A selection of liturgical resources which can be used in private prayer and public worship to pray with and for a same-sex couple who want to mark their love before God. Use of the Prayers of Love and Faith is always optional.

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DRAFT APPROACH FOR THE INTRODUCTION OF BESPOKE PRAYERS OF LOVE AND FAITH

Currently, the Prayers of Love and Faith are commended for private use or as part of a regular service – for example in a Sunday Eucharist or Evening Service of the Word. The current draft proposal (agreed in outline at July 2024 General Synod) is to offer the option of holding a standalone or bespoke service in which the Prayers would be used.

A proposal to update the **Guidance for the use of the Prayers** for a bespoke service has been drafted. A bespoke service is a service planned especially to use the Prayers with a couple. The draft guidance for bespoke services makes it clear such services should not try to simulate marriage or pretend that the Church has decided to extend marriage to same-sex couples.

Alongside this Guidance, a draft Code of Practice has been produced to outline how pastoral reassurance might be provided to those who feel they cannot be cared for in all respects by their diocesan bishop.

The use of Prayers of Love and Faith in both regular and bespoke services would be at the discretion of the minister-in-charge¹. It is good practice for a minister to decide on the use after consulting the congregation and

agreeing on a shared view with the Parochial Church Council (or other appropriate governing body). In Team or Mission Areas good conversations with colleagues and partner churches are equally important to make sure the decision making on the use of the Prayers takes into account the different contexts in which they might be used. Places that want to offer bespoke services will be asked to register this with their diocesan bishop. Churches that have opted in can use a Prayers of Love and Faith tag to indicate this publicly on AChurchNearYou.com. More detailed guidance on how to come to a decision on the use of the Prayers, and on how to use them, can be found in the draft **Pastoral Guidance**. This guidance also provides advice on holding good conversations around issues related to LLF and navigating disagreements about the use of the Prayers of Love and Faith.

Bespoke means a service that is organised especially to say the Prayers of Love and Faith with a couple, held separately from regular services.

¹ A member of clergy needs to have the status of a minister-in-charge or incumbent in order to be able to decide on the use of the Prayers of Love and Faith in their parish. For more detail, please see the Guidance on the Prayers of Love and Faith and the CoP. For ease of reading, this documents uses 'minister'.

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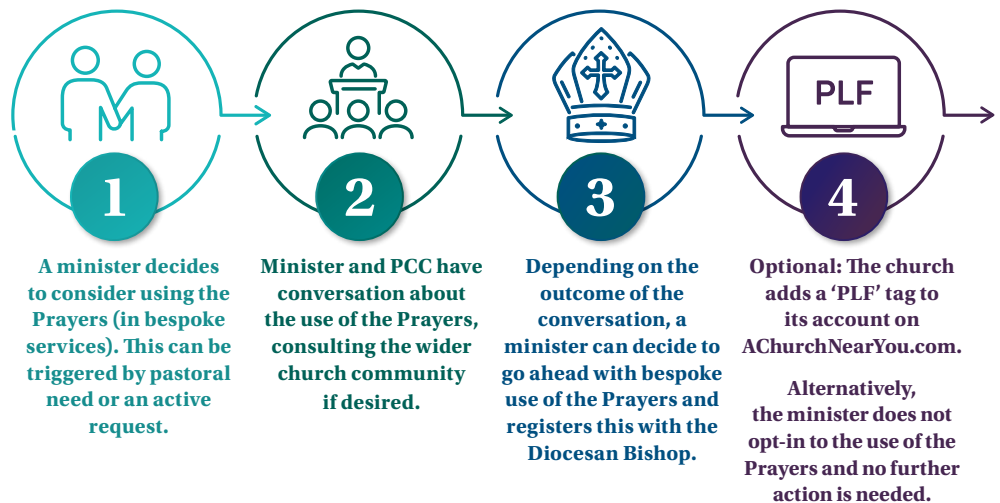
DRAFT STRUCTURE FOR PASTORAL REASSURANCE THROUGH DELEGATED EPISCOPAL MINISTRY

The Church understands there is deep disagreement on the introduction of the bespoke services using the Prayers of Love and Faith. The draft Code of Practice suggests Pastoral Reassurance could provide additional measures for these differences in theological conviction. Pastoral Reassurance is there for those who wish to use the Prayers of Love and Faith and those who do not.

If churches disagree with their diocesan bishop on the use of the Prayers, they can request support from another bishop in the same region. This is described as delegated episcopal ministry, a possible compromise that could enable churches to benefit from the care of a bishop who shares their position about the Prayers, but who remains under the legal jurisdiction of the diocesan bishop. This option would be symmetrical, which means a church that holds a

different theological view than their diocesan bishop can request some specific aspect of ministry from a bishop that shares their conviction either to use or not to use the prayers. The decision to request delegated episcopal ministry would be made by a Parochial Church Council, following consultation with the wider worshipping community. Pastoral Reassurance acknowledges that despite our differences, there is place for different theological convictions within the Church.

How to come to a decision to opt-in to the use of the Prayers of Love and Faith?



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How might delegated episcopal ministry work?



The draft **Code of Practice** details how responsibilities could be delegated from a diocesan bishop to another bishop. This would be managed through a Regional College of Bishops. As part of this arrangement, each diocesan bishop would be expected to outline their stance on the Prayers of Love and Faith, and their plan for delegated episcopal ministry. If there are no bishops within a particular region who can offer delegated ministry, a serving bishop from outside that region could be invited to participate in the Regional College. Only a PCC can request delegated episcopal ministry. For individual ministers, episcopal care could be requested.

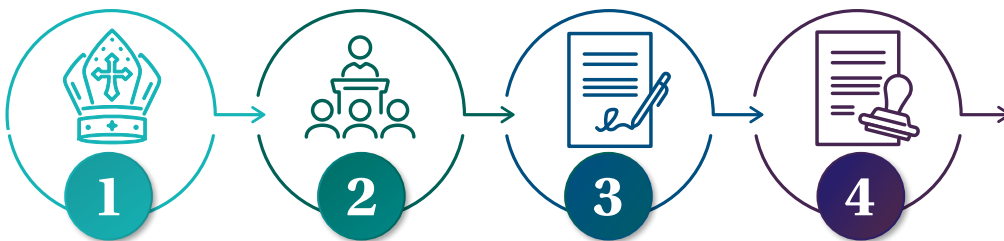
How might ongoing work affect the proposal for pastoral reassurance?



The suggestion to base Pastoral Reassurance on the delegation of episcopal ministry raises both theological and practical questions. Work is underway on key theological questions and principles around the Church's understanding of episcopacy. In addition, consultation with dioceses and other bodies will look at the workability of these draft proposals. The House of Bishops has not yet decided on the draft proposal and it will be further developed in the coming months, based on the feedback received.

How might Pastoral Reassurance be requested?

Details on Pastoral Reassurance and delegated episcopal ministry are available in the draft **Code of Practice**



1
A PCC may request Pastoral Reassurance (PR). They should first speak to their diocesan bishop to understand different perspectives, ministerial needs, and concerns.

2
A PCC may request PR based on the bishop's action taken or statements made, not on what a bishop is alleged to think. If a PCC wishes to proceed after step 1, they can make a decision by simple majority, following consultation with the wider worshipping community.

3
A PCC writes to their diocesan bishop requesting Pastoral Reassurance, including their grounds for the request. The diocesan bishop respond within four to six weeks.

4
Pastoral Reassurance is granted and the PCC's request is made public alongside the bishop's agreement.

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THEOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS: PREVIOUS AND ONGOING WORK

The **Faith and Order Commission** advises the Church on theology and doctrine (official teaching). Their work on the Prayers of Love and Faith so far has looked at the type of theological disagreement the Church is having, the differences between same-sex marriage, civil marriage and holy matrimony, and the role of conscience in bishops' work.

The theological advice from the ERG to date indicates an argument can be made that the Prayers of Love and Faith as outlined are not and do not resemble a marriage, or change the doctrine of marriage. However, the context in which the Prayers might be used, especially in bespoke services, could impinge directly on the doctrine of

marriage. Further research on the contexts in which the Prayers might be used is ongoing. It will inform any future decisions by the House of Bishops and guidance for the use of the Prayers in bespoke services. This work is expected later in 2025. For more information on the theological work of FAOC, please see **this summary**.



What about the question of removing current restrictions on clergy entering same-sex marriages?

Further theological and legal work is being prepared on the question of removing restrictions on clergy in same-sex marriages. This will advise the House of Bishops on the process and timetable to make a decision on this question. Updates on this work will be made to the House of Bishops at its meetings, with the report to follow in autumn 2025.

Greater clarity on the status of clergy in same-sex marriage will also help shape new guidance on vocations and ministry. It is one reason why the draft package of proposals around the Prayers of Love and Faith and pastoral reassurance is not likely to be considered by General Synod until February 2026.

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CONSULTATION AND NEXT STEPS

Feedback & input on the proposals

The House of Bishops aim to discuss and revise the draft proposals so that they will come to General Synod for debate and decision in February 2026. Ahead of this, a wide range of views will be gathered via informal consultations for consideration by the College and House of Bishops and to help refine the final proposals.

A key part of these informal consultations is asking diocesan synods to explore the suggested proposals together. Doing this could help diocesan synod members understand better what is being proposed, and comment on hopeful signs, challenges, or omissions. A further set of resources for holding these conversations and for gathering feedback can be found here. You might also find this video helpful. Some dioceses are working with LLF facilitators for these meetings. The LLF team is also gathering feedback from other bodies, such as the Theological Education Institutions, the Dioceses Commission and ecumenical partners.

Period of Discernment

The draft proposal on the bespoke use of the Prayers and the accompanying guidance suggest trying this over a period of three years, called the period of discernment. During this period the use of the Prayers of Love and Faith will be evaluated to find out more about their liturgical and pastoral use. The uptake of pastoral reassurance and how people experience this will also be assessed. The feedback received on the use of the Prayers and pastoral reassurance will be reported back to Synod and could be used to change and improve the proposal.

Get in touch

Please get in touch if you have suggestions of Church organisations, other than diocesan synods, that should be part of the consultation. If you have any particular questions or comments about the informal consultation, please email llf@churchofengland.org.

Since views differ on these draft proposals, informal consultations and further theological advice will help the House of Bishops to revise these proposals prior to deciding whether to take them to General Synod for debate and decision.

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TIMELINE



July 2024

General Synod agrees to explore using the Prayers of Love and Faith in bespoke or 'standalone' services, together with Pastoral Reassurance, for a three-year discernment period.

Synod also asks the House of Bishops for further (theological) work on the question of clergy in same sex marriage.



May 2025

House of Bishops meeting to discuss theological advice on doctrine of marriage, Delegated Episcopal Ministry and clergy in same sex marriage.



Oct 2025

House of Bishops meeting to discuss further theological advice from the Faith and Order Commission.



Feb 2026

If the House of Bishops agrees, full proposals brought to GS for debate & decision.



Jan 2025

House of Bishops agree on an extended timeline for decision making on the use the Prayers of Love and Faith in bespoke services and a timeline for decision making on clergy in same-sex marriages.



Apr – Oct 2025

Informal consultations with Diocesan Synod members and other stakeholders to ask for feedback on workability and impact of proposals.



Dec 2025

House of Bishops to decide on the final draft proposals to go to General Synod.

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GLOSSARY

Bespoke service of PLF

A service that is organised especially to say the Prayers of Love and Faith with a couple, held separately from regular services. Previously called ‘stand alone’ service.

Discernment

Discernment in a Christian context means listening carefully to God in order to make nuanced judgments about whether or not something is a faithful way to think, feel, and act.

Doctrine

The official teaching of the Church.

Minister-in-charge, incumbent

The priest with the responsibility for a parish, who is able to decide on the use of the Prayers of Love and Faith, including in bespoke services.

Pastoral Reassurance

A mechanism to allow for different theological convictions within the Church of England. Delegated episcopal ministry (see page 8) is a form of pastoral reassurance.

FAQS

What is the deadline for submitting feedback?

Ideally by 22 September, in time for the October House of Bishops meeting. If you cannot schedule a diocesan synod prior to that, there is a later option of 1 December.

What is the best way to submit feedback?

Ideally digitally, using Mentimeter. Details on how to use this are available in the consultation guidance for Diocesan Synod Chairs on the **LLF website**. Please use AdobeScan or a similar app to share feedback from paper forms as PDF to llf@churchofengland.org.

Are you asking Diocesan Synods to vote on the draft proposals?

No, this is an informal consultation to gather feedback from individual synod members, not a formal vote on the draft proposals.

Is feedback anonymous and how will it be used?

Feedback will be used to further shape the draft proposals and will not be citing individuals or naming specific churches. It will be identifiable to the place/group that hosted the conversation.

Want to know more about LLF? Visit the **LLF learning hub**, which has resources for both groups and individuals.

